Who is Mumia Abu-Jamal?

Mumia Abu-Jamal is a renowned journalist from Philadelphia who has been in prison since 1981 and on death row since 1983 for allegedly shooting Philadelphia police officer Dan Faulkner. He is known as the "Voice of the Voiceless" for his award- winning reporting on police brutality and other social and racial epidemics that plague communities of color in Philadelphia and throughout the world. Mumia has received international support over the years in his efforts to overturn his unjust conviction.

Mumia Abu-Jamal was serving as the President of the Association of Black Journalists at the time of his arrest. He was a founding member of the Philadelphia Chapter of the Black Panther Party as a teenager. Years later he began reporting professionally on radio stations such as NPR, and was the news director of Philadelphia station WHAT. Much of his journalism called attention to the blatant injustice and brutality he watched happen on a daily basis to MOVE, a revolutionary organization that works to protect all forms of life--human, animal, plant--and the Earth as a whole.

The Scene

In 1981, Mumia worked as a cab driver at night to supplement his income. On December 9th he was driving his cab through the red light district of downtown Philadelphia at around 4 a.m. Mumia testifies that he let off a fare and parked near the corner of 13th and Locust Streets. Upon hearing gunshots, he turned and saw his brother, William Cook, staggering in the street. Mumia exited the cab and ran to the scene, where he was shot by a uniformed police officer and fell to the ground, fading in and out of consciousness. Within minutes, police arrived on the scene to find Officer Faulkner and Mumia shot; Faulkner died. Mumia was arrested, savagely beaten, thrown into a paddy wagon and driven to a hospital a few blocks away (suspiciously, it took over 30 minutes to arrive at the hospital). Mumia somehow survived.

The Trial

The trial began in 1982 with Judge Sabo (who sent more people to death row than any other judge) presiding. Mumia wished to represent himself and have John Africa as his legal advisor, but before jury selection had finished, this right was revoked and an attorney was forcibly appointed for him. Throughout the trial, Mumia was accused of disrupting court proceedings and was not allowed to attend most of his own trial. Sabo lived up to his nickname of "Prosecutor in Robes."

The Evidence

The prosecution claimed that the shot which killed Faulkner came from Mumia Abu-Jamal's legally registered .38-caliber weapon, contradicting the medical examiner's report that the bullet removed from Faulkner's brain was a .44-caliber. This fact was kept from the jury. Moreover, a ballistics expert found it incredible that police at the scene failed to test Mumia's gun to see if has been recently fired, or to test his hands for powder residue. One of the most damning prosecution claims was that Mumia confessed at the hospital. However, this confession was not reported until nearly two months after December 9th, immediately after Mumia had filed a brutality suit against the police. One of the officers who claims to have heard the confession is Gary Wakshul. However, in his police report on that day he stated, "the Negro male made no comments." Dr. Coletta, the attending physician who was with Mumia the entire time, says that he never heard Mumia speak.

The Witnesses

The star prosecution witness, a prostitute named Cynthia White, was someone no other witness reported seeing at the scene. During the trial of Billy Cook (Mumia's brother) just weeks before Mumia's trial, White gave testimony completely contradictory to what she stated at Mumia's trial. Her testimony at Billy Cook's trial placed someone at the scene who was not there when police arrived. This corroborates the other five witness accounts that someone fled the scene. In a 1997 hearing, another former prostitute, Pamela Jenkins, testified that White was acting as a police informant. Other sworn testimony revealed that witness coercion was routinely practiced by the police. In 1995, eyewitness William Singletary testified that police repeatedly tore up his initial statement--that the shooter fled the scene--until he finally signed something acceptable to them. The following year, witness Veronica Jones came forward to testify that she had been coerced into changing her initial statement that two men fled the scene. Witness Billy Cook, who was present the whole time, has stated very clearly that Mumia is absolutely innocent.

The Sentence

Due to police manipulation of witnesses, fabrication of evidence, and the rights of the defense severely denied, Mumia was found guilty. He was sentenced to death during the penalty phase based solely on his political beliefs. Mumia has been unjustly separated from his family for twenty-two years, with the threat of death looming over his head.

New Witnesses

In 2001, court stenographer Terri Maurer-Carter came forward and stated that in 1982, before Mumia's trial began, she heard Judge Sabo say, "Yeah, and I'm going to help them fry the n****r." He was referring to Mumia. This backs up evidence of judicial bias and racism in Mumia's case. In the same year, esteemed Philadelphia journalist Linn Washington stated that on the morning of December 9th, 1981, he went to the scene to report on it--and no police were present. This

backs up prior claims that police didn't handle the crime scene properly.

In 1999, Arnold Beverly confessed to killing Officer Faulkner. This confession is validated by a lie detector test administered by eminent polygraph expert Charles Honts. Despite concrete evidence supporting this confession, the Philadelphia District Attorney has refused to investigate, and the courts have not even allowed it to be heard. The injustice continues

The Decisions

On December 18th, 2001, Judge Yohn issued a decision on the Habeas Corpus petition in Federal District Court. He upheld Mumia's unjust conviction, but challenged the sentencing phase (the death sentence).

He ordered the State of Pennsylvania to commence new sentencing proceedings within 180 days and ruled that it was unconstitutional to require that a jury's finding of circumstances mitigating against determining a sentence of death be unanimous.

Both the prosecutor and Mumia's attorney were unhappy with the decision and appealed.

On May 17, 2007, the Third Circuit Court heard oral arguments regarding the reinstatement of the death sentence and an appeal from Mumia's attorney stating that the trial was unfair because of racial bias in jury selection. One year later, on March 27, 2008, the courts upheld the Yohn decision but denied the racial bias claim.

Mumia attempted to petition the courts for a reconsideration of the decision by the full panel of twelve judges, but that request was denied.

As it now stands, Mumia is still working through the appeal process and is trying to get a new trial. While the courts granted a new jury trial on the question of penalty, life or death, Mumia's attorneys want a trial were the new evidence can be admitted in evidence. They will work tirelessly until they achieve that goal and his freedom.

Free Mumia Abu-Jamal

Write to Mumia at:
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Post Office Box 33028
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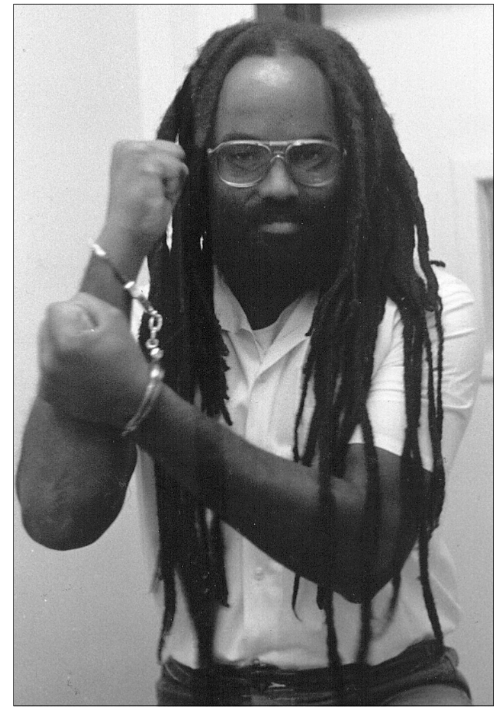
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Voice of the Voiceless Serving Life In Prison